

STATEMENT OF DONALD W. MURPHY, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SENATE ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, CONCERNING S. 431, TO ESTABLISH A PROGRAM TO AWARD GRANTS TO IMPROVE AND MAINTAIN SITES HONORING PRESIDENTS OF THE UNITED STATES

November 15, 2005

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the Department of the Interior on S. 431, a bill to establish a program to award grants to improve and maintain sites honoring Presidents of the United States.

The Department supports efforts to protect Presidential sites, which honor our country's former presidents and are an important historical part of our national heritage. The birthplaces, museums, memorials, and tombs provide excellent resources to study and learn about our past presidents' lives, leadership, and values. The value and educational benefit of visiting first hand the birthplace or other memorial site of a person one has read or studied about can leave a very indelible impression that cannot be acquired in any other way. Being involved in history and in the lives of those who have contributed to our American legacy through physical, mental, and emotional contact with the things that helped shape their lives or the places that store their remains can bring a deeper appreciation of our country's struggles and the heritage we enjoy today.

However, because of the financial implications of this bill on national parks and park programs, the Department opposes the enactment of S. 431 at this time. We believe funds are more

appropriately directed at this time to reducing the long list of necessary but deferred construction projects that have been identified in our national parks.

Our opposition does not detract from the significance and importance of creating partnerships with public and private entities to preserve and maintain the non-Federal Presidential sites of our nation's past presidents. Rather, our opposition is due to our belief that it is inappropriate to use limited National Park Service appropriations to fund maintenance and improvement projects for institutions and sites that are not part of the National Park System.

We encourage the family foundations, historical societies, historic preservation organizations, and other non-profit organizations that own the majority of these sites to continue to seek funding for the maintenance and improvement projects necessary to prevent further deterioration and continued interpretation of these sites and structures. We believe that there are other sources of funding available for the restoration and maintenance needs of these Presidential sites. One national example is the Save America's Treasures program that awards grants for preservation and conservation work on nationally significant intellectual and cultural artifacts and nationally significant historic structures and sites. These Presidential Sites are "national class properties" and would, we believe, compete favorably in the Save America's Treasures program as well as in any other fundraising campaign. The Department would be more than happy to assist with developing Save America's Treasures applications to accomplish this important work.

S. 431 authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to establish a grant program to help pay for major repairs, modifications, and capital and interpretive improvements to non-Federal Presidential

sites. The legislation would establish the Federal share of the cost to be 50 percent or less of the total cost of a project. Appropriated funds of \$5 million would be authorized for fiscal years 2006 through 2010, with funds available until expended. The bill states that 15 percent of the grant money would be used for emergency projects; 65 percent for Presidential sites with a 3-year annual operating budget of less than \$700,000, with an endowment less than 3 times the annual operating budget; and 20 percent for sites with an annual operating budget of \$700,000 or more, with an endowment equal to or more than 3 times the annual operating budget. It also states that unexpended funds may be used for another category of projects described in the Act.

S. 431 also outlines the application and award procedures and authorizes the establishment of the Presidential Site Grant Commission (Commission). The operators and owners would submit applications to the Secretary who would then forward them to the Commission. The Commission would review the applications and make recommendations to the Secretary for grant assistance. Of the five members on the Commission, two of the four members appointed by the Secretary would represent the Presidential sites eligible for grant awards. The term for an appointed member is two years. The bill states that during the two-year period in which a representative of a particular site serves on the Commission that site would be ineligible for grant money under this Act.

Presidential sites honor our country's former presidents and are an important historical part of our national heritage. While we recognize that these sites provide a valuable link to understanding our country's history and government, we believe that National Park Service funds should not be authorized for this purpose.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my prepared testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions you or your committee may have.